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Ernst Kurth's *Grundlagen des linearen Kontrapunkts* (1917), though influential in its time and today the subject of renewed scholarly interest, is hard to situate in the swirling currents of conservative and progressive musical thinking in the 1910s. The basic arguments of the book—part music-psychology text, part counterpoint treatise dealing with Bach—are by now well known. Kurth's wholesale rejection of Riemann's triadically oriented approach to harmony and counterpoint, then dominant in the German academy, and his focus on Bach's "linear counterpoint" seem at first to point in the direction that Schenker's thought was taking at the same time. Kurth in fact goes further than Schenker in condemning as too "vertical" not only recent harmonic theory, but also virtually all contrapuntal theory of the preceding centuries, including Fux. It is thus not hard to read *Grundlagen* as an apology for the "harmony-free" polyphony that was to be composed in the 1920s by modernists such as Hindemith and Krenek (who cited Kurth in their defense); indeed, the very phrase "linear counterpoint" had been coined for a similar purpose more than a decade before Kurth used it. Yet, on the other hand, when the term became a slogan for all parties in a war between musical conservatives and progressives, Kurth

refused to side with the latter, insisting that he had been misunderstood and recording his dislike of modernism and atonality.[1]

Conflicting tendencies are evident from a political perspective too. Kurth's background in an assimilated Jewish family in Vienna would seem unlikely to put him in sympathy with the resurgent currents of conservatism and nationalism in central Europe in the early years of the century. Yet his characterization of Bach's polyphonic idiom as intrinsically German and "northern" in contrast to the supposedly "southern" Classical style that he disliked sounds surprisingly reminiscent of the popular racial vocabulary of Houston Stuart Chamberlain.[2] It would appear, then, that Kurth had a habit of reining in his "progressive" tendencies (conceivably for the sake of academic advancement), unless, of course, some rationale can be found to account for these apparently conflicting impulses.

One way in which Kurth's radical credentials can be reasserted is by setting the rhetoric of *Grundlagen* in the context of German Bach reception of the early twentieth century. Building on his conception of musical events as "tension processes" taking place on the subconscious level of the Schopenhauerian Will, Kurth maintains that in Bach "the linear structure is continually imbued with tension and forward motion. Something *restless* resides in Bach's counterpoint".[3] He hears a "will to infinity" in Bach's extended lines, which strive to escape the mundane, everyday world. This hint of a tense, uneasy Bach contrasts sharply with the prevailing image of the composer that had emerged from a wide survey of prominent musicians conducted by the journal *Die Musik* in 1905. The responses to the question "what is Johann Sebastian Bach to me and what is his importance for our time?" returned again and again to the topos of a cure against physical or psychological disease. "Bach is the fountainhead of everything healthy in music." "For our neurasthenic generation, Bach's art of rude health is the beneficent nourishment of musicians." "In our highly stimulated age, no-one should omit to drink from the restorative spring of Bach, which is needed for the strengthening of heart and brain." Bach was "an invigorating, never-failing medicine, not just for all those composers and musicians who are diseased from misunderstood Wagner, but for all those contemporaries who suffer from spinal problems of any kind."[4] At this time, fin-de-siècle anxieties were sweeping Europe, raising the specter of human "degeneration" with its symptoms of hyper-nervousness, hysteria, effeminacy, exaggerated aestheticism and perversity. The most potent musical symbol of this supposedly enervating decline, Strauss's *Salome* (1905), prompted one critic to sigh, "after reading a score like that…I need to cleanse my musical feeling with a bath in Bach".[5] In this light, Kurth's Bach is highly distinctive. His counterpoint serves not as an injection of moral fiber from a healthier age but as an expression of the very kind of restless tension that many critics wanted to see banished from music.

[1] Kurth 1922, Preface. On this controversy, see Rehding 1995, 55–84; Schader 2001, 109–21, 129–69. Probably the earliest use of the term 'linear counterpoint' was by Rudolf Louis in 1895, who applied it to a modern idiom. In 1911 Guido Adler put forward a similar concept which he called 'polyody' to describe passages from Schoenberg's *Pelleas und Melisande*. Louis 1909, 201; Adler 1911, 254; Rehding 1995, 4, 64–6.

[2] Kurth 1922, 175–6. Chamberlain's *Die Grundlagen des 19. Jahrhunderts* (1899) was the example for many crude north/south dichotomies invoked in the early years of the century.

[3] Kurth 1922, 372; translation in Rothfarb 1991, 54. 'Der lineare Satz ist ständig von Spannkraft und andrängender Bewegung durchwirkt. In Bachs Kontrapunkt liegt etwas Ruheloses.'

In what follows, I argue that *Grundlagen* at times advances a surprisingly unorthodox image of Bach. Kurth's picture of a musical texture composed of linear strands infused with "psychic motions" is unmistakably prefigured in the theory and reception of Expressionism in the visual arts, a movement which reached its height at the time he was writing the treatise. Apologists for Expressionism, above all the art historian Wilhelm Worringer, viewed the linear patterns found in certain historical styles of art and architecture as the projection into space of an artist's acute inner psychic tension. This process was thought to be exemplified by medieval Gothic—the term referring to the artistic designs of the period as a whole, not just architecture. Like Expressionism itself, Gothic was seen as a fundamentally German style, but one which told of a creator possessed by "sublime hysteria". Kurth followed the art critics in rejecting the theory and practice of "Classicism" and locating his preferred aesthetic objects in opposition to it. Above all, though, Kurth's technical descriptions of Bach's counterpoint closely resemble art historians' accounts of early medieval "interlaced ornament", right down to the complex interweaving of independent lines and the principle of alternate establishment and dissolution of definite, recognizable shapes. Kurth chose not to thematize these links with the visual arts: ever adept at covering his tracks when it came to his aesthetic influences, he may have suspected that an Expressionist Bach would receive a cool reception from the German academy. But such links form a useful context for his theoretical ideas insofar as they help to explain how Kurth was able to portray Bach both as distinctively "German", and at the same time as a composer of tense and uneasy music. They confirm that Kurth's Bach is in its own way a radical conception, but not because his counterpoint has been emancipated from harmony in the sense that the modernist composers would have understood. Rather, Kurth projects back onto Bach some preoccupations of progressive early twentieth-century art criticism.

[4] Wilhelm Berger, Frank van der Stucken, Max Schillings and Max Reger, quoted in Frisch 1998, 128.

[5] Georg Göhler in *Die Zukunft* 15 (1907); quoted in Shigihara 1990, 217.

I make no attempt here to lay out the content of *Grundlagen* or present a full picture of its intellectual context—tasks that have been pursued at length elsewhere.[6] Instead I examine a neglected strand of aesthetic influences on the treatise. I begin by drawing attention to connections between Kurth's conception of "linearity" in music and analogous ideas in the theory of the visual arts. I then examine Kurth's criticism of the theory and practice of musical "Classicism". After comparing the respective aesthetic vocabularies of Kurth and Worringer, I make a digression into Kurth's monograph on Bruckner, which is instructive for the way it deals with an array of aesthetic issues similar to those addressed in *Grundlagen*, while being much less coy about framing its argument explicitly in terms of the psychology of Worringer's "Gothic man". Kurth's bold hermeneutic approach to Bruckner's Ninth Symphony, which compares certain linear components in the first movement to the interior design of a Gothic cathedral, provides a model for my interpretation of some of his writings on Bach's counterpoint. Here I put Kurth's assertions about the restlessness and other-worldly striving of the counterpoint on a firm techincal footing by comparing his analytical vocabulary with the language that art critics used to describe interlaced ornament. I attempt to construct an Expressionist hearing of a Bach fugue which could map onto a "Kurthian" analysis of the same piece.

Musical and Visual "Linearity"

Much of the attractiveness of Kurth's writings stems from the way he blends technical issues with aesthetics. As recent commentators have shown, his musical discourse is infused with the vocabulary of physical dynamics and kinetics, all predicated on the psyche. Fundamental parameters of music such as harmony, melody and rhythm are described as various kinds of "energy", while the whole of music's sonic manifestation is seen as the physical trace of an underlying play of psychic tension processes, forces and motions. For Kurth, the basic task of music theory is to scratch beneath the surface of Schopenhaurian "appearance" to uncover the essential world of musical dynamics.[7]

At the heart of Kurth's thinking, however, stands a troublesome concept: linearity. Much is invested in it, yet Kurth never spells out its full meaning or implications. Despite its presence in the title of *Grundlagen*, the geometrical metaphor of the line seems, strictly speaking, superfluous to Kurth's otherwise systematically developed analogy with physics, which designates melody as kinetic energy or psychic motion. The notion of linear counterpoint caused considerable misunderstanding among Kurth's early readers (albeit sometimes with significant creative results). Many mistakenly assumed that his insistence that harmony was not the generative parameter

[6] Rothfarb 1988, Krebs 1998, Rehding 1995 and Schader 2001.

[7] Kurth's basic theoretical categories are discussed in detail by Rothfarb 1988 and Krebs 1998.

of music implied that he considered vertical relationships to be of minimal importance for the final product.

In fact, Kurth himself admits that "linear counterpoint" is a misnomer. He rejects as too vertically oriented not only previous contrapuntal theory, but even the term counterpoint itself. "Punctus contra punctum" implies that each tone is to be isolated and considered in relation to a single tone in another part. For Kurth, this is already an essentially harmonic conception. Instead of "tone against tone", we should think of whole "linear currents" freely developing next to one another. A musical texture in which this occurs should be referred to not as "contrapuntal" but as "paralinear".[8] Lee Rothfarb, one of Kurth's most lucid exegetes, puts it thus: "linear counterpoint results when two or more…kinetic melodic strands are combined in a complementary manner. Harmony is a "result" of multiply directed lines, not a pre-existent grid."[9] Thus, as Kurth sees it, his conception does not pave the way for "harmony-free" composition, but merely assigns harmony a non-generative status.

Kurth's distrust of vertical relationships as a basis for theoretical explanation can be attributed to his conviction that melody must be understood not as a succession of individual tones, but as an "element of transition" passing "between" or "over" the tones. In this sense, as Wolfgang Krebs puts it, Kurth's concept of line refers to "the transitional character of music in general".[10] Melodic line is thus not something physically given, but something filled in by the listener. Rothfarb and Krebs agree that one of Kurth's immediate sources for this idea was the psychologist and aesthetician Theodor Lipps, who described melody as:

> Internal motion which, in a uniform flow, passes through the tones and even fills in the rests; [it is] a motion which is our motion, but for us [it lies] in the tones and also in the empty spaces between them.[11]

Lipps in turn based his *Ästhetik* (1903–6) on the notion of "empathy" (*Einfühlung*)—a term also used by Kurth—according to which aesthetic experience is "objectified self-enjoyment", with the subject projecting its own feelings or inner processes into an aesthetic object.[12] In the case of music, the listener projects an internal sense of motion onto, and "between", the physical tones of a melody.

[8] Kurth 1922, 99–102.

[9] Rothfarb 1991, 24.

[10] Krebs 1998, 198.

[11] Lipps 1903–06, 1: 411; translated in Rothfarb 1988, 13.

[12] Lipps 1903–06, 1: 419–24; on the nineteenth-century tradition of *Einfühlung* in German aesthetics, see Lange 1971, 113–28.

In the first decade of the twentieth century, Lipps's influence was strongly felt in the visual arts. In Munich, where his lectures at the University were eagerly attended by young artists and critics, there was ready acceptance for his idea that in the act of following a visual line—just as with a melody—we project onto it our own sense of motion. Lipps's Munich was at the hub of new artistic developments in Germany that sought to cast off the shackles of traditional naturalism in painting and establish an aesthetic informed by a sense of the psychological, rather than the representational, significance of the basic categories of color, form and line. The movement known as *Jugendstil* (essentially the German equivalent of Art Nouveau) cultivated a characteristic "convoluted wavy line…undulating, coiling, turning endlessly back on itself", which appeared on wallpaper, architecture, jewelry, ceramics and posters. As Thomas Mann put it, in Munich there reigned decoration, sensuousness, beauty, and "a guileless cult of line".[13] By the second decade of the century, this ethos had spread across much of central Europe.

It seems sensible, then, to attempt to interpret the apparently intrusive concept of linearity in Kurth's theory of psychic dynamics in the light of developments in the theory of the visual arts in the wake of Lipps. Before pursuing this course, however, I shall address the question of what Kurth and the art critics felt was at stake in their respective attempts to overturn previous theoretical approaches.

Musical Classicism in Theory and Practice

The interest in the psychology of line reflected a wider movement in German art criticism and practice, which cast itself as an alternative to "Classicism". Classicism was used a "catch-all" term encompassing traditional aesthetic concepts such as naturalism, imitation, illusion and impressionism—in short, the belief that objects should be represented, and represented truthfully. For instance, the Viennese art historian Alois Riegl rejected the tendency of late nineteenth-century German critics (who valorized Classical antiquity and the Renaissance) to interpret the history of art as a story of the perfecting of techniques of illusion. He argued instead that each culture has its own psychological and practical needs, which lead to a specific *Kunstwollen*. Art history should break free of normative aesthetics and trace the *Kunstwollen*'s constantly changing constellations.[14] Thus, following Lipps's example, art critics were more than ready to interpret visual lines as psychological categories testifying to the state of mind of their creator, rather than as representational tools.

Kurth too liked to invoke Classicism—in his case, the music of the Viennese "Classical" composers—as an antithesis to the styles of music he preferred. To his ears, Classicism all but suppresses the linear element in music, and stands outside

[13] Weiss 1979, 4–8. On the 'prophets of abstraction' Hermann Obrist, August Endell and Adolf Hölzel, see pp. 28–47

[14] See, for instance, Riegl 1901.

the world of psychic dynamics. Classical melody, though song-like, is determined by "vertical" harmony and a rhythm of regular downbeats. Two-measure units and their multiples are concatenated and articulated by regular harmonic cadences, producing symmetrical, "closed", 8- or 16-measure periods. This basic reliance, as Kurth sees it, on the natural rhythms of the human body (especially pronounced in Classical marches and dances) is fatal to the free development of the melodic line *as* line, since it is chopped up by regular pauses and phrase endings. By contrast, Bach's "spun-out" lines, being generated solely by psychic forces, observe no predetermined metrical framework, and in theory are unlimited in extension.[15] For Kurth, Classicism's regular rhythmic scheme affirms humanity's earthly life and physical constitution, whereas the melodic style of Bach has something spiritual and mystical about it. It is the mark of a "will to infinity" which renounces, and breaks free of, earthly things.[16]

Kurth treats the last millennium of music history as an ideal battleground for the competing musical principles of linearity and homophony. He reasons in a similar fashion to Riegl. Each historical era represents a particular realization of available psychological possibilities. A style testifies to the musical *Weltanschauung* of its age, which in turn is the expression of a certain *Grundwille*.[17] In particular, Kurth maintains that the mystical, otherworldly striving of Bach's polyphony is replaced in the mid eighteenth century by a feeling of sensuous, earthly joy, and contentment with human nature. With the advent of Romanticism, and above all in Wagner and Bruckner, the Classical preoccupation with triadic harmony and pulsating rhythm recedes, reflecting the reassertion of psychic forces and the urge to infinity. This works in different ways for each composer, although Kurth is prone to collapsing the distinctions, hearing Wagner's "endless melody" even in Bach. He portrays the psychological oppositions that he constructs in terms of national mentalities, in particular a north/south essentialism typical of nationalist strands of German culture of the day. The feeling of transcendent striving is a fundamentally German, or "northern" (*nordisch*), phenomenon, and can be traced back to medieval religious sentiment. Classicism is "southern", with its roots in Italy and in what Kurth calls a musical "Renaissance" movement in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.[18] His sympathies clearly lie with the northern, mystical, linear style and with its modified re-emergence in Romanticism. After all, on Kurth's terms, Classicism's disruption of music's linear element means that it loses touch with the dynamic essence of music that is described in the opening chapters of his treatise.

[15] Kurth 1922, 152–5. On Kurth's notion of 'Fortspinnung' and its relation to the ideas of Wilhelm Fischer (like Kurth, a pupil of Guido Adler), see Rothfarb 1988, 31–41.

[16] Kurth 1922, 51–5, 149–52, 155–9.

[17] Ibid., 174. Kurth's approach to music history is discussed by Krebs 1998, 92–107.

[18] Kurth 1922, 175–6.

According to Kurth, the fatal mistake of most previous music theory is that it takes Classicism as its aesthetic standard and applies it to music in general. As a consequence, it fails to make a sufficiently rigorous separation between vertical and horizontal relationships, and counterpoint is virtually absorbed into harmonic theory. Kurth's main targets are the harmonic and phrase theories of Hugo Riemann, which at the time of *Grundlagen* dominated musical pedagogy in German universities. Indeed, Kurth's picture of Classicism is very much one viewed through a Riemannian filter, though with Riemann's value judgements inverted. For Riemann, musical phrase structure is always founded on the eight-measure period comprised of four-measure antecedent and consequent phrases. The duality extends to lower levels, finally encompassing even upbeats and downbeats, and yielding a multi-level hierarchy based on "Zweitaktigkeit". This structure is inherent in musical perception, and even unorthodox periods may justifiably be regarded as deformations of the basic model. Riemann finds his principles best exemplified in the music of the Viennese Classical composers, and for him the very concept of "Classicism" implies a certain historical universality. Riemann's harmonic theory, meanwhile, appeals both to acoustics and to a corresponding sense of "musical logic" in the listener in order to establish triads, the principles of their concatenation, and thus tonality. His results are again normative: any music in which triadic harmony is not realized is implicitly downgraded as somehow not fully formed. Even his cultural essentialism is the reverse of Kurth's, since harmonic music is of exclusively "northern" origin.[19] For Kurth, Riemann's harmonically oriented approach to musical hearing is futile, since by confining itself to physical and physiological matters it remains anchored to the world of appearance. Riemann's mistaken theories of phrase structure and of harmony are two sides of the same coin in that they both reflect an undervaluing of musical linearity.[20]

An exchange between the two theorists in the pages of the journal *Zeitschrift für Musikwissenschaft* in 1919 crystallizes their differences. Riemann, though generous to Kurth in some respects, complains that *Grundlagen* makes a "false separation of style periods", which has "seriously damaged the book's value".[21] In defense, Kurth points to a conflict between relativist and absolutist attitudes as "the kernel of the difference between me and Riemann as regards rhythm and phrasing". He says he objects not to Riemann's theory as such, but to its misapplication to inappropriate repertories. Since each historical style reflects a specific manner of realizing psychic energy on the level of musical appearance (in accordance with particular cultural and psychological conditions), each demands its own theoretical approach. Thus Kurth—perhaps a little disingenuously, given his clear aesthetic preferences—

[19] See Rehding 2000, 367–71.

[20] See especially Kurth 1922, 56–7, 64, 150, 157. Critical remarks about Riemann are scattered throughout the book, both in the main text and in asides and footnotes.

[21] Riemann 1918, 32.

adopts a Riegl-like tone of disinterest and historicism, by implication accusing Riemann of measuring all music by the "gold standard" of Classicism.[22]

Willhelm Worringer on Gothic and Classical Art

At two key moments in the course of his argument about southern Classicism and northern linear composition, Kurth adds footnotes referring to the writings of the art historian Wilhelm Worringer.[23] Worringer's books *Abstraction and Empathy* (*Abstraktion und Einfühlung*, 1908) and *Form in Gothic* (*Formprobleme der Gotik*, 1911) were widely read in progressive German artistic circles in the 1910s, and went through many reprints. They instigated something of a fashion for Gothic in which, following Worringer's own suggestion, the medieval German artist was cast as a kind of proto-Expressionist. The Gothic style came to exemplify the alternatives to Classicism in the visual domain.[24] Worringer's interest in "primitive" or "tribal" art, ancient Egyptian art and, in short, any art that could be dissociated from the supposedly stifling tradition of Classicism, struck a chord with European Modernism. By contrast, his work was relatively poorly received in the German academy, perhaps on account of his rhetorically charged prose and his taste for the broad narrative sweep rather than detailed, systematic historical analysis.[25]

Worringer, who studied in Munich in the first decade of the century, weds Riegl's notion of variable *Kunstwollen* with Lipps's ideas about the psychology of line. However, he invokes Lipps's concept of empathy principally as a foil for his own original notion of "abstraction". For Worringer, empathy's range of application should be highly circumscribed: it is an appropriate response only to Classical art (whether ancient or modern), and it embodies what he regards as lamentable assumptions inherent in the discipline of aesthetics, according to which "beauty" and technical ability are the only legitimate criteria for judgement. Conventional art criticism undervalues the achievements of medieval, non-European and ancient non-Classical cultures by indiscriminately attempting to assimilate them via a process of empathy. Worringer's books attempt to overturn these value judgements by positing abstraction as an alternative mode of apprehension more suitable to the psychological conditions that determine the forms of non-Classical art.

Worringer outlines a series of ideal psychological states, each of which reflects a different relationship between humanity and the world. "Primitive man" lives in

[22] Kurth 1918, 178, 179.

[23] Kurth 1922, 181, 182.

[24] On the significance of Gothic in Expressionist art and criticism, see Bushart 1990. Worringer's influence is especially marked in some of the early landmarks in Expressionist criticism. See Bahr 1916 and Fechter 1914. His ideas also stand behind Scheffler 1917 (p. 38).

[25] On Worringer, see Donahue 1995; Perkins 1974, 47–68; and Bushart 1990, 18–50.

cultures which have not yet developed writing, traditions and history. He is oppressed by a sense of absolute "dualism" and suffers from acute "spiritual agoraphobia"—a fear of the vast, incomprehensible, seemingly arbitrary world. His art, which is always connected with religion, is an attempt to hold back the forces of arbitrariness through the creation of absolute values. Basic abstract, geometrical shapes, wholly alien to earthly existence, reflect his yearning for a refuge beyond fluctuating appearances, where stability and permanence may be found.[26]

"Classical man", by contrast, lives contentedly in a state of spiritual equilibrium. The advancement of his rational faculties means that he has nothing to fear from the world, and can even successfully manipulate it. Life for Classical man becomes more beautiful, but, as Worringer maintains with an implicit sneer, it loses its depth, grandeur and force. Man is now the measure of all things; in his arrogance he even assimilates the divine (in the shape of the Greek gods) to human form. In art, empathy replaces abstraction as man finds joy in the "rhythm" of the organic world. (Worringer's criteria for "organic" structure are harmony, regularity, balance, "inward calmness", arrangement about a central point, and equilibrium of centrifugal and centripetal forces.) Along with Lipps, Worringer describes empathy as "objectified self-enjoyment", so the pleasure of Classical art is nothing but humanity's pleasure at its own nature.[27]

In southern Europe, the spiritual history of humanity can be characterized as a transition from the Primitive to the Classical. In the north, however, a quite different development takes place, which sees the emergence of the unbalanced "Gothic man". For Worringer, the term "Gothic" refers not merely to the forms of medieval church architecture, but has a far more general application, encompassing the style of ornament of the "Migration Period" (fifth and sixth centuries AD), the work of sixteenth-century artists such as Dürer, Holbein and Grünewald, and even the later southern German Baroque style. It eventually died out, however, in the face of the relentless advance of the renewed Classicism of the Italian Renaissance. Like many German critics since Goethe, Worringer maintains (against much empirical evidence to the contrary) that Gothic is a peculiarly German idiom, adding that it is the special property of "Aryan peoples" (*arische Völker*).[28] The essence of Gothic, apparent in all its manifestations, lies in the interaction of certain aspects of the Primitive and

[26] Worringer 1922, 12–19.

[27] Ibid., 19–23. On organic structure, see Worringer 1997, 60, 114.

[28] Worringer insists that he uses this phrase "not in any spirit of race-romanticism such as that of [Houston Stuart] Chamberlain," not least since "a disposition to Gothic is found only where Germanic blood (*germanisches Blut*) has mingled with that of other races." But he cannot wholly escape the essentializing racial discourse of his age, acknowledging that "a Germanic strain is probably the *conditio sine qua non* for Gothic." 1922, 29. He has to work hard to account for the fact that the earliest Gothic architecture appeared in northern France. *Ibid.*, 96–7. On the nineteenth-century reception of medieval Gothic, see Robson-Scott 1965 and Lewis 1993.

Classical artistic attitudes. But, far from a harmonious synthesis of opposing principles, this amounts to an uneasy hybrid. The abstract lines of Primitive art reappear, yet their straightforward patterns are replaced by a "restless tumult", a "confused medley". The lines are still utterly inorganic, yet they possess an intense vitality which seems to invite the projection into them of human feeling. As a consequence, the maladjusted Gothic man directs his organically tempered sense of empathy to forms testifying to an abstract world lacking all organic rhythm. The result is a kind of morbid frenzy:

> Man has transferred his capacity for empathy onto mechanical values. Now they are no longer a dead abstraction to him, but a living motion of forces. And only in this heightened motion of forces, which in their intensity of expression surpass all organic motion, was Northern man able to gratify his need for expression, which had been intensified to the point of pathos by inner disharmony.[29]

> When…finally yielding to compulsion, [the vital feeling's] forces flood these lifeless lines, it feels itself carried away in a strange and wonderful manner and raised to a frenzy of motion, far outstripping any possibilities of organic motion.[30]

Instead of following the restful, symmetrical patterns that Worringer regards as typical of Classical ornament, the "northern line" is driven onwards without respite save to veer into tortuous digressions or to suffer strange convulsions. For Worringer, it seems to embody an unconscious Will which is more powerful than conscious human feelings and desires.[31] In contrast to the happy, harmonious Greeks, Gothic man is afflicted by "sublime hysteria" (*erhabene Hysterie*).[32]

The parallels between Worringer and Kurth are obvious. Both seek to rehabilitate a non-Classical, "northern", "Germanic" idiom in the face of what they perceive as pro-Classical bias in the academic Establishment. Classical art is marked by symmetry and a regular rhythmic structure. It is oriented to earthly enjoyment, the

[29] Worringer 1919 147; 1997, 113 (translation amended). 'Der Mensch hat sein Einfühlungsvermögen auf mechanische Werte übertragen. Die sind ihm nun keine tote Abstraktion mehr, sondern eine lebendige Kräftebewegung. Und nur in diese gesteigerten Kräftebewegung, die in der Intensität des Ausdrucks über alle organische Bewegung hinausgeht, vermag der nordische Mensch sein durch innere Disharmonie ins Pathetische gesteigertes Ausdrucksbedürfnis zu befriedigen.'

[30] Worringer 1922, 31; 1927, 42 (translation amended). 'Wenn [das Vitalgefühl] endlich, dem Zwang gehorchend, seine Kräfte in diese an sich toten Linien einströmen lässt, fühlt es sich in einer unerhörten Weise fortgerissen und zu einem Bewegungstaumel gesteigert, der alle Möglichkeiten organischer Bewegung weit hinter sich lässt.'

[31] Worringer 1922, 32, 36; 1927, 42, 53.

[32] Worringer 1922, 50, 114; 1927, 73, 169. On the 'psychologizing' of hysteria, in this, the 'heroic period' of the disease, see Micale 1995, 3, 24–9.

affirmation of life, and what they both call "the here and now" (*das Diesseitige*). The northern idiom, by contrast, breaks free from the boundaries established by Classicism; its lines give the impression of a restless striving for the infinite and "the hereafter" (*das Jenseitige*). Kurth even speaks of "the Classical man" and his "instinct for symmetry". He contrasts Classical music, which "cling[s] to life's fullness", with the "*abstract* trait" of polyphonic art. The latter's "towering and sublime" forms are "comparable to the forms of church architecture".[33] In fact, Kurth did not need much imagination to adapt Worringer's system to his musical polemic: one of the chapters of *Formprobleme der Gotik* is already entitled "The endless melody of northern line" ("Die unendliche Melodie der nordischen Linie").[34] And Kurth blatantly borrowed the subtitle of *Abstraktion und Einfühlung* ("Ein Beitrag zur Stilpsychologie") as the subtitle for an essay of his own on Bach.[35] It is no surprise to discover that Worringer and Kurth shared an affiliation to the University of Berne. Their tenure as lecturers overlapped between 1912 and 1914, the years immediately prior to the writing of *Grundlagen*.

Bruckner's *Ninth Symphony* and the Interior of the Gothic Cathedral

When Kurth comes to engage directly with Bach's music he is much more reticent in making the link with Expressionist art criticism, so an explicit example of the connection in his writings is needed in order to interpret his analyses. The mighty, two-volume, 1350-page *Bruckner* (1925) provides the necessary clues. Here Kurth reiterates some of the arguments of *Grundlagen*, accusing previous literature on the composer of advancing unsuitable "Classical" standards to judge the works of a fundamentally anti-Classical artist. And once again he advances a "dynamic" theory which identifies psychological processes with the music's "linear" formations. This time, however, Kurth makes no effort to hide the composer's affinity to the medieval Gothic mentality described by Worringer, and invokes the components of the Gothic architectural style in a hermeneutic account of the first movement exposition of Bruckner's Ninth Symphony.

Throughout *Bruckner*, Kurth's tone is defensive. Despite the success of the "Bruckner movement" among Wagnerians and a burgeoning Bruckner literature in the 1920s, he regarded his subject as woefully misunderstood and undervalued.[36]

[33] Kurth 1922, 181, 177, 174. 'Der klassische Mensch', 'Instinkt zur Symmetrie', 'Anklammerung an die Lebensfülle', 'Zug ins Abstract' (my emphasis), Überragende', 'Erhabene', 'ähnlich der Formen der kirchlichen Baukunst'.

[34] Worringer 1922, 36.

[35] Kurth 1917.

[36] On *Bruckner*, see Parkany 1988; Rothfarb 1988, 190–2; and 1991, 29–33, 151–207. Kurth would probably have dissented even from the ideas of his mentor August Halm, for whom Bruckner's symphonies were a triumphant, quasi-Hegelian synthesis of the 'two cultures of music': the (Bach) fugue and the (Beethoven) sonata. See Rehding 2001, 142–160.

Critics had failed to recognize the differences between Bruckner's approach to form and that derived from the example of musical Classicism. Form, says Kurth, is not a conceptual ground- plan or a list of themes, transitional passages, codas and the like, but a "shaping stirring of the will", a process of becoming. And although he admits that all musical form, including that of Bruckner, is an interaction between static and dynamic principles, he believes that conventional criticism tips the balance too far towards the static. Kurth's *apologia* therefore includes an explanation of Bruckner's unappreciated "formal dynamics" and a systematic description of the "symphonic waves" that are the concrete manifestations of these ideal forces.[37]

Kurth regards Bruckner in essence as a musical mystic, whose creative energies penetrated far beyond "appearances" to the realm of the unconscious. Drawing on a fashion for the writings of early German mystics (especially among commentators on Expressionism, who saw them as the direct precursors of modern artists), he compared Bruckner to Meister Eckart, Johannes Tauler, Thomas à Kempis and Jakob Böhme. These mystics sought God not in the world around them but in the depths of their own souls. At the same time they strove to overcome the personal and achieve union with the general, the divine. Bruckner's ethos is therefore at root anti-Classical (in both the philosophical and the musical sense). He is at once a typical Romantic and a throwback to "the medieval-Gothic man" ("der mittelalterlich-gotische Mensch").[38] Again the influence of Worringer is clear. "The dynamic nature", says Kurth, "appears in all art more a feature of the northern-Germanic spirit, while the static formal principle lies more in the Roman spirit, and even in the Hellenistic, and even in German music, as the Classical period shows".[39]

For Worringer, medieval Gothic man possessed two complementary spiritual aspects: "the psychology of mysticism" and "the psychology of scholasticism". These correspond respectively to the interior and exterior of the Gothic cathedral. Like most architectural historians, he identifies the ribbed vault and the pointed arch as the main distinguishing features of the Gothic interior. According to Worringer, the ribbed vault began as a play of lines serving a purely decorative purpose, though one fully in tune with the Gothic psychology. Only later were these ribs converted into an inner scaffold to support the vault. Likewise, the pointed arch and the Gothic accentuation of the vertical have an implicit psychological motivation: they are symbols of infinity and of liberation from the world.[40]

[37] Kurth [1925] 1971, 233–54.

[38] Ibid, 3–11. On mysticism, see Bushart 1990, 145–8.

[39] Kurth, [1925] 1971, 256–65, 250, n. 2. 'Die dynamische Natur erscheint in der gesamten Kunst mehr als ein Merkmal nordisch-germanischen Geistes, während das statische Formprinzip mehr dem Romanischen liegt, auch dem Hellenistischen, wie die klassische Periode auch der deutschen Musik beweist.'

[40] Worringer 1922, 37, 91–2.

On one level, though, mysticism represents a relaxation of the transcendentalism of Gothic *per se*. The mystic no longer seeks the Divine in austere abstraction, instead turning inward to find it in the human soul. Remarkably, some of the typical features of Classicism now start to show themselves in Gothic. With the Divine entering humanity itself, there is a tentative reappraisal of all things earthly. "A warm wave of tender sensuousness floods the stiff northern world." This is "the lyrical element of Gothic", which contrasts with its usual angular lines, and highlights natural forms. Creeping tendrils wind around the columns, while the capitals are overrun with leaves, buds and blossom.[41]

Nevertheless, Worringer makes it clear that this compromise with sensuality never goes as far as it does in the art of Classical Antiquity or the Renaissance. The overall experience of the Gothic interior is one of restless striving for liberation from earthly life. The overwhelming power of this experience prompts him to draw analogies with music. "To be deafened in this manner by the fortissimo of the music of space entirely suited the Gothic religion and its striving for liberation." The "heavenward-striving motion" of the nave is the "main theme" (*Hauptsatz*) of the whole building, while the side-aisles are a more profusely developed "prelude" (*Vorspiel*).[42] This musical conceit even penetrates as far as the fundamental opposition of the Gothic and the Classical man:

> Gripped by the frenzy of [the] mechanical forces, which thrust out all their terminations and aspire toward heaven in a mighty crescendo of orchestral music, [the Gothic man] feels himself convulsively drawn aloft in blissful vertigo, raised high above himself into the infinite. How remote he is from the harmonious Greeks, for whom all happiness was to be sought in immersion in the balanced repose of gentle organic motion, which is alien to all ecstasy.[43]

This "deafening" music of Gothic, the "mighty crescendo of orchestral music" with its extended preludes, already sounds remarkably like Bruckner.

Kurth, for his part, warns against too facile a comparison between music and architecture. Bruckner's music does not rely on the translation of architectural forms

[41] Ibid., 118–123; 'eine warme Welle zarter Sinnlichkeit [strömt] in die starre nordische Welt'.

[42] Ibid., 106, 102. 'Diese Betäubung durch das Fortissimo der Raummusik entsprach eben ganz der gotischen Religiosität und ihrem Erlösungsdrang'; 'himmelanstrebende Bewegung'.

[43] Worringer 1919, 147; translation in 1997, 113 (amended). 'Ergriffen vom Taumel dieser aus allen Enden hervordringenden, in mächtigem Krescendo gegen Himmel strebenden Orchestermusik mechanischer Kräfte fühlt er in seligem Schwindel sich krampfhaft emporgerissen, sich hoch über sich selbst hinaus in Unendliche gesteigert. Wie fern steht er dem harmonischen Griechen, dem alles Glück nur von der Versenkung in die ausgeglichene, aller Ekstase fremde Ruhe der sanften organischen Bewegung kommt.' Worringer also considered that in late Gothic sculpture 'the music of drapery drew together in a last full-toned symphony' (1919, 157; 1997, 120).

into sound, still less the stylistic traits of medieval music. Rather, it signals the reawakening of the very psychic forces that gave rise to Gothic; it is "not a representation, but a metaphysics of Gothic". All the same, Kurth cannot resist rehearsing an anecdote according to which Bruckner conceived the Ninth Symphony while walking for hours around St. Stephen's Cathedral in Vienna, " utterly entranced by the sight of its towering pillars, buttresses, spires and turrets".[44] In fact, although he deems the Gothic psychology to be relevant to all Bruckner's music, it is the Ninth above all in which its role is decisive. For Kurth, this work is filled throughout with a gloomy, medieval feeling: the self-absorption of the mystic recreates the linear art—indeed the very "will to form"—of a long-past age.[45]

The first movement of the Ninth begins, as Kurth puts it, "not with the main theme but with its absolute will to form". (He regards it as typical of Bruckner to start a movement with "undifferentiated lines of force" which only much later congeals into a definite theme.)[46] Kurth considers the opening, introduction-like section to be a single process of intensification culminating in the theme.[47] This process is grounded not on motivic relationships—though they can be found if looked for—but on a growing sense of dynamic stretching, tugging and striving. In the soft opening measures, for instance, a tentative "will to upward stretching" ("Wille zu Höherstreckung") outlines first a minor third, then a fifth, and finally a major second. After a protracted crescendo, the main theme enters in a unison tutti passage marked *fff* (Example 1(a)). At last the tugging of the will achieves a definite shape. The theme is a "bold expression of the stretching idea". The unison texture meanwhile contributes to a "powerfully sweeping linear formal striving".[48]

[44] Kurth [1925] 1971, 673; 'ganz vom Anblick seiner hochragenden Pfeiler, Streber, Türme und Türmschen gebannt'.

[45] Kurth sees the Third Symphony as a kind of sister of the Ninth, sharing its key, mood and "will to form"; *Ibid.*, 820, 828, 841, 846, 853, 862 and 976. The opposite pole of Bruckner's creative output is the Fourth, which exudes light, life and nature. *Ibid.*, 599–601, 661, 681–2. Kurth was not the first to draw an analogy between Bruckner's symphonies and Gothic architecture; see Lang, 1924, 35.

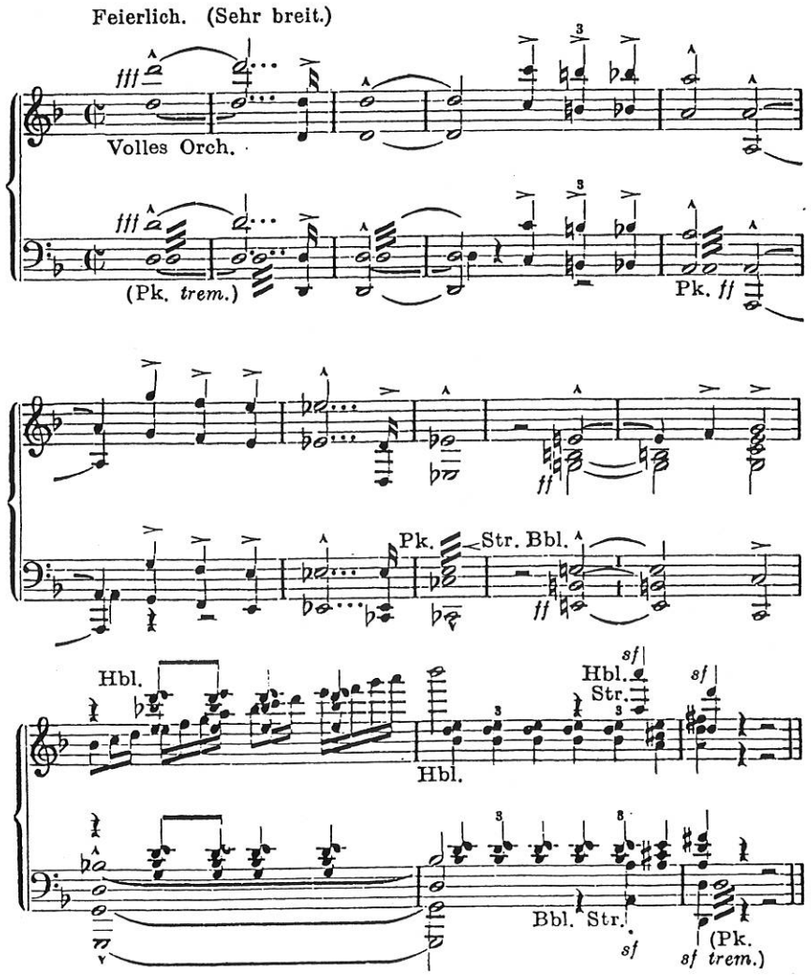
[46] Ibid., 279–90, translated in Rothfarb 1991, 151–161; 'undifferenzierte Kraftlinien'.

[47] Kurth's reliance on the early Bruckner editions of Ferdinand Löwe and the Schalk brothers—now widely regarded as corrupt—undermines some of his analyses. The examples that follow are his own piano reductions from the Löwe edition of the Ninth Symphony, but do not raise any problematic issues.

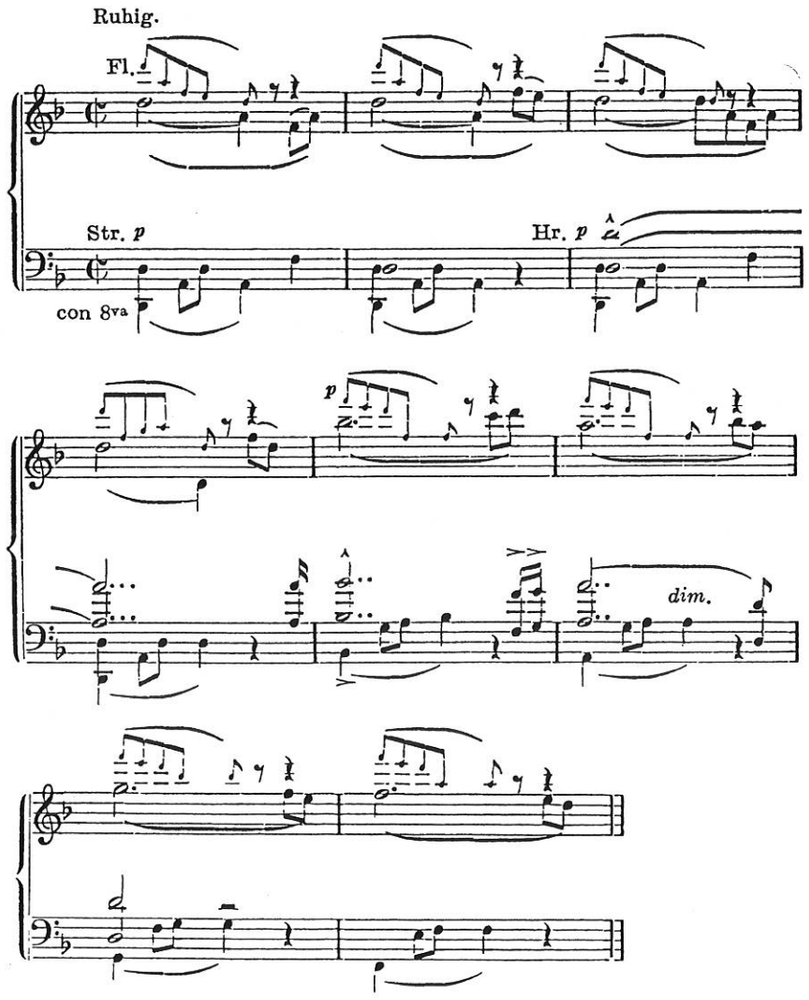
[48] Kurth [1925] 1971, 662–8; 'mächtig ausschwingende lineare Formstrebung'.

Example 1. Bruckner, Symphony No. 9, first movement, as cited in Kurth [1925] 1971, 370, 666-69.

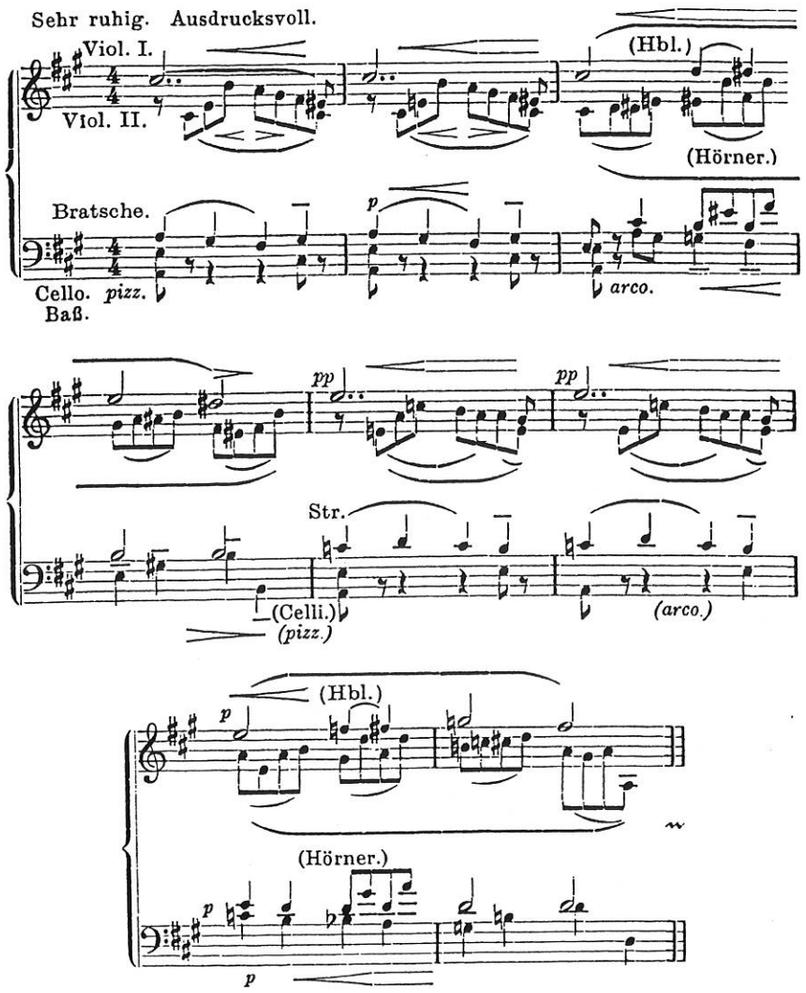
Example 1(a). 'First main theme'



Example 1(b). 'Third main theme'



Example 1(c). 'Second main theme'



This striving is equally apparent in the third main theme, also in D minor (Example 1(b)). The primary "formal line" is in the upper strings, but is complemented by an eighth-note figure on flutes and an expansive theme on horns (mm. 3–7 of the extract). In the fifth measure, the upper strings, pulled about in "jagged corners and

points", achieve a "restless formal ecstasy". At the same moment, cellos and basses abandon their role as a harmonic foundation and join them in unison. There is now a sense of "ecstatic upward striving". Together, the lines summon up "a single formal idea and with it the expressive power of other-worldly longing".[49]

Examples 1(a) and (b) are characterized by wide melodic leaps, the avoidance of dense textures, and the doubling of lines over many octaves. For Kurth this reflects the Gothic emphasis on the vertical in both its upward striving and downward plunging. Conversely, in architecture the perpendicular tendency can be called the "music of Gothic". In Gothic art "the currents of motion were already the hidden musical elements, whether they were bound into the stone construction of the cathedrals or dissolved into the artistic synthesis of their interior spaces".[50] Kurth detects the "steepness" of Gothic expression even in the voicing of many of Bruckner's orchestral chords, with their octaves, fifths and sixths but relatively sparing use of thirds. The final chord of the first movement of the Ninth, for instance, lacks the third of the D minor triad and is distributed over seven octaves. Such chords are the direct analog of Gothic architecture's "thin pillars and columns".[51]

The second main theme (Example 1(c)) presents the alternative face of Gothic. This, according to Kurth, is Bruckner's equivalent of the "soft, plaited lines" that help to ameliorate the rigid, vertical orientation of the cathedral interior, covering the struts and pinnacles with blossom-like ornament and "soft tendril-work", and breathing life into their otherwise "stony coldness".[52] In the first violins' melody Kurth hears "sensory fullness"; the longing felt in the upward leap of a minor sixth, he says, is now much calmer than in Examples 1(a) and (b). The figure in the second violins is a "true tendril motive", which winds its way through the texture.[53] The viola part begins with a steady rocking pattern, but in the third measure it too is drawn into "the tendril-like tangle of lines".[54]

With this account of the Symphony's second theme, Kurth draws both aspects of Worringer's "psychology of mysticism" into his interpretation. The three themes of the exposition alternately personify the "mighty crescendo" of the heavenward-striving vaults and the "lyrical element" of natural ornament. The exposition of the

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[49] Ibid., 668–670. 'Im ganzen Gefüge all der Linien nichts als Verstrahlung des einen Formgedankens und dabei die Ausdruckgewalt überweltlichen Sehnens.'

[50] Ibid., 676. 'Die Bewegungszüge sind schon in der gotischen Kunst die verborgenen musikalischen Elemente gewesen, ob sie nun in den steinernen Aufbau der Dome gebannt, oder in die Gesamtkunst ihrer Innenräume aufgelöst waren.'

[51] Ibid., 676–9.

[52] Ibid., 670. 'Weiche geschlungene Linien', 'steinerne Kälte'.

[53] Ibid., 671. 'Sinnliche Fülle', 'ein echtes Rankenmotiv'.

[54] Ibid. 'Die Rankenartigen Linienverschlingungen.'.

first movement thus becomes a psychological drama centered on the consciousness of the Gothic man. The example of Bruckner's Ninth Sympnhony shows how in practice Kurth's vocabulary of dynamic, linear formations and their "otherworldly" impulses can be mapped onto Worringer's aesthetic categories. I now offer a similar interpretation of some of Kurth's analyses of Bach in *Grundlagen*, albeit with reference to a very different manifestation of medieval "Gothic".

Bach's Counterpoint and Early Medieval Interlaced Ornament

One of Worringer's aims in *Formprobleme der Gotik* was to demonstrate the underlying psychological unity between the architectural Gothic of the Christian church and the much earlier medieval ornamental styles found on metalwork and other artifacts from northern Europe. In so doing, he was effectively fusing two hitherto independent strands of nationalist art history. The "Germanness" of Gothic was a well established (if dubious) nineteenth-century commonplace. By contrast, the interest in early medieval art of central and northern Europe, and the conception of it as peculiarly German, can be dated to the final decades of the century. With the founding of the Wilhelmine Empire in 1871, hopes grew that an ancient German cultural heritage could be uncovered which would reflect the origins of the newly united people. Particular interest was focused on the late Roman period and the time following Rome's withdrawal from its outposts in Western and Southern Germany in the fourth century AD. Nationalist historians tended to assume the existence of a single, integrated "Germanic" people to whom modern-day Germans could trace their roots, and whose character could be read in their art. Recent archaeological finds in Germany and Scandinavia, some believed, would reveal clues to the essence of this people.[55]

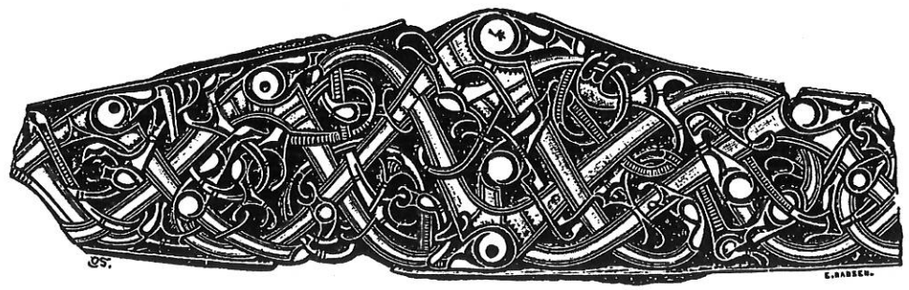
Several decades before Worringer, early medieval ornament from northern Europe was already noted for the abstract quality of its lines. Above all, it was believed that in the development of the "animal ornament" of the fifth and sixth centuries, a trend could be discerned whereby the outlines of the creatures—chiefly birds and quadrupeds—became ever more obscured, and the purely linear element ever more pronounced. In the advanced stages of this development, exemplified by a piece of Swedish metalwork cited by Worringer (Figure 1), a few recognizable features, such as eyes, beaks and claws, can be discerned, but these are placed at the service of a highly convoluted, abstract design. The strips that curve away from the large "eyes" seem at first glance to be the animals' torsos; yet they soon taper into even thinner strands which chase and cross one another in intricate ways that are

[55] On the reception of the early middle ages in the second half of the nineteenth century, see Ehringhaus 1996. The disciplinary rivalry between the traditional 'Altertumswissenschaft' and the new, nationalist 'Vorgeschichte' is charted by Merchand 1996, 152–170.

described in the literature as "entwined", "latticed", "knotted" or "plaited".[56] By Worringer's time, it was usual to refer to such patterns as "linear fantasy" or a "fantasy of lines".

> On the basis of [an] elementary Aryan grammar of line, a particular linear language gradually developed, which clearly revealed itself as being a specifically Germanic idiom. It is the linear fantasy that, in the materialistic theory of art, is described as interlaced ribbon or plaited ornament.[57]
>
> Interlaced ornament would later find memorable applications in the decorated initials of illuminated manuscripts and in Viking art.

Figure 1. Bronze clasp decorated in the interlaced animal style, Gotland, Sweden (Migration Period). Worringer 1922, reproduced from Salin, 1935, 277.



607. *Gotland, Schwed.* Br. $^1/_1$.

For theorists of Expressionism, this dazzling play of lines met with welcome approval. Whereas, in the mid nineteenth century, the Classically-oriented scholar Gottfried Semper slightingly described northern ornament as a "dark, chaotic confusion of lines" ("finster chaotische Liniengewirr"), a critic in the 1910s could speak sympathetically of Expressionist art in exactly the same language: a "chaotic confusion of lines, colors or ideas" ("chaotisches Linien- oder Farben- oder Gedanken-

[56] 'Verklammert', 'vergittert', 'verknotet', 'verflochten'. See Worringer 1922, 30; Salin 1935, esp. 245–290; Müller 1881, 39–71 and 1897, 2: 207–223; Lamprecht 1882, 3–17; Seesselberg 1897, 19–21, 45–50. The idea of a trend toward abstraction was most strongly advanced by Salin, whose categorisation of the animal ornament of this period into three discrete styles is still in use today. However, the principle that these styles reflect a strict chronological development is now questioned. See László 1974, 28–32.

[57] Worringer 1922, 30; translation in 1927, 41.

gewirr") which led straight back via Gothic architecture to "urgermanische Kunst".[58] For Worringer, early ornament exemplified the restless, driving quality that he sensed in the "endless melody" of all types of "northern line". He compared these linear patterns to the marks made on paper by a pencil held by someone under intense mental stress. Rather than smooth, rounded curves, the pencil traces angular, jagged shapes, with ceaseless interruptions and doublings back. According to Worringer, when we observe such a line we feel our perceptions impelled by an alien will that obstructs our desire for gentle, organic motion.[59] The example of the shuddering pencil was well known among psychologists at the turn of the century, and was called "hysterical writing".[60] Accordingly, early northern ornament is a prime symptom of Gothic man's sublime hysteria:

> The restless life contained in this tangle of lines is unmistakable. This restlessness, this seeking, has no organic life that draws us gently into its motion; but there is life there, a vigorous, urgent life, that compels us joylessly to follow its motions. Thus, on an inorganic foundation, [there is] heightened motion, heightened expression. Here we have the decisive formula for the whole medieval North. Here are the elements which later on…culminate in Gothic. The need for empathy of this inharmonious people does not take the nearest-at-hand path to the organic, because the harmonious motion of the organic is not sufficiently expressive for it; it needs rather that uncanny pathos which attaches to the animation of the inorganic.[61]

It is the interlaced ornamental style rather than the towering form of a mighty cathedral that inspires Worringer to this, his most succinct and vivid account of the misplaced empathy of the Gothic man. Rather like the products of latter-day Expressionism, medieval ornament speaks to him of a search for extreme expression: the symptom of an inability to endure the present world.

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[58] Semper is cited in Worringer 1922, 34; the Expressionist artist and critic Käthe Brodnitz in Perkins 1974, 79.

[59] Worringer 1922, 32–4.

[60] See Binet 1888, 299–306. Worringer was far from the first to try to account for Expressionist tendencies in the visual arts in this way. See Weiss 1979, 44, 174 (n. 142).

[61] Worringer 1919, 100, repeated on 141–2. Translation in 1997, 77 (amended). 'Vielmehr ist in diesem Liniengewirr ein unruhiges Leben nicht zu verkennen. Diese Unruhe, dieses Suchen hat kein organisches Leben, das uns sanft in seine Bewegung mit hineinzieht, aber Leben ist da, ein starkes hasterfülltes, das uns zwingt, glücklos seinen Bewegungen zu folgen. Also auf anorganischer Grundlage eine gesteigerte Bewegung, ein gesteigrter Ausdruck. Hier ist die entscheidende Formel für den ganzen mittelalterlichen Norden. Hier sind die Elemente, die später…in der Gotik gipfeln. Das Einfühlungsbedürfnis dieser disharmonischen Völker nimmt nicht den nächstliegenden Weg zum Organischen, weil ihm die harmonische Bewegung des Organischen nicht ausdrucksvoll genug ist, es braucht vielmehr jenes unheimliche Pathos, das der Verlebendigung des Anorganischen anhaftet.'

A final notable feature of early northern ornament is the collection of "simple motives" (*einfache Motive*) which serve as Worringer's "elementary Aryan grammar of line". The specific "linear language" that arises from the grammar does so by means of the especially resourceful fashion in which they are combined. Worringer quotes Karl Lamprecht, the author of an epic, multi-volume history of the German lands and their peoples and culture:

> There are certain simple motives whose interweaving and commingling determines the character of this ornament. At first there is only the dot, the line, the ribbon; later the curve, the circle, the spiral, the zigzag, and an S-shaped decoration are employed. Truly, no great wealth of motives! But what variety is attained by the manner of their employment! Here they run parallel, then entwined, now latticed, now knotted, now plaited, then again brought through one another in a symmetrical checker of knotting and plaiting. Fantastically confused patterns are thus evolved, whose puzzle asks to be unraveled, whose convolutions seem alternately to seek and avoid each other, whose component parts, endowed as it were with sensibility, captivate sight and sense in passionately vital motion.[62]

Figure 1, though it does not contain all the motives mentioned here, certainly displays most of the techniques of employment that Lamprecht lists, and gives a sense of the "passionately vital motion" that he imputes to the "fantastically confused patterns".

Kurth himself refers to early medieval ornament in only the most elliptical fashion. One of his footnotes on Worringer draws a comparison between Classicism in music and in the visual arts, and mentions "analogous phenomena in architecture and the visual arts (in particular the ornamental line)"[63] But he does not specify whether he means the ornamental line in Classicism or Gothic or both. Nevertheless, Worringer's picture of early medieval ornament strikingly anticipates a number of salient features of Bach's polyphony that are discussed at length in *Grundlagen*. This is evident on the descriptive as well as the detailed technical level.

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[62] Worringer 1922, 30; 1927, 41. The passage originally appeared in Lamprecht 1891–1909, 1: 178–9. 'Es sind gewisse einfache Motive, durch deren Verflechtung und Durchdringung der Charakter dieser Ornamentik bestimmt ist. Anfänglich nur der Punkt, die Linie, das Band, später dann schon die Bogenlinie, der Kreis, die Spirale, das Zickzack und eine s-förmige Verzierung wurden angewendet. Wahrlich kein grosser Reichtum an Motiven. Aber welche Mannigfaltigkeit wird erzielt durch die Art ihrer Verwendung. Bald erscheinen sie parallelisiert, bald verklammert, bald vergittert, bald verknotet, bald verflochten, bald wohl gar in gegenseitiger Verknotung und Verflechtung durcheinandergewürfelt. So entstehen phantastisch wirre Muster, deren Rätsel zum Nachgrübeln reizen, deren Gerinnsel sich zu meiden, zu suchen scheint, deren Bestandteile gleichsam empfindungsbegabt in lebendigleidenschaftlicher Bewegung Sinn und Auge fesseln.'

[63] Kurth 1922, 182; 'analoger Erscheinungen in der Architektur und bildenden Kunst (insbesondere auch in der ornamentalen Linie)'.

The most obvious point of contact is Kurth's tendency to describe Bach's line in terms of "fantasy". "In its measureless extensions, its formal force transporting [us] beyond all external symmetry…contains a sign of the limitless and the mystical; fantasy lies in the freely shaped linear development of the polyphonic style". The line evinces "unrestricted melodic shaping and preoccupation with the fantasy of the freest formal expression".[64]

To achieve this feeling of infinite extension in practice, Bach must observe what Kurth calls "the foremost principle of all linear contrapuntal technique: through an artful distribution of tension and relaxation in the network of voices, never to allow the internal dynamism to flag".[65] The main stipulation is the avoidance of clear-cut cadences and of simultaneous pauses in all voices. A further technique, though, especially useful when the parts are not rhythmically differentiated, is the "crossing-over of peaks and ascents" ("Durchkreuzung der Höhepunkte und Steigerungen"). The crossing of peaks in particular is "one of the most essential formal laws of polyphonic design".[66] Bach cleverly staggers the melodic peaks in the different parts, so that even when rhythmic values are identical— or, as in Example 2(a), lines arpeggiate chords—the independence of each line is safeguarded, and it still makes sense to speak of linear counterpoint. "Bach's two-voice polyphony exhibits the jaggedly criss-crossed image of *intersecting* waves with their mounting up, ebbing away, and fluctuating overlap".[67] The similarity to Lamprecht's and Worringer's descriptions of the interlaced ornamental style is obvious. And the analogy is more powerful still if we compare the visual patterns that emerge in the notation of Example 2 (especially 2(b)) with Figure 1. Although in the music examples the series of notes do not literally cross one another, the pattern of complementary undulating curves mirrors the Swedish metalwork. Each line in the texture pursues a similar course, yet, since the melodic peaks are staggered, those lines are unmistakably independent, sometimes running parallel, sometimes in contrary motion.

[64] Ibid., 154, 180 (my emphasis).

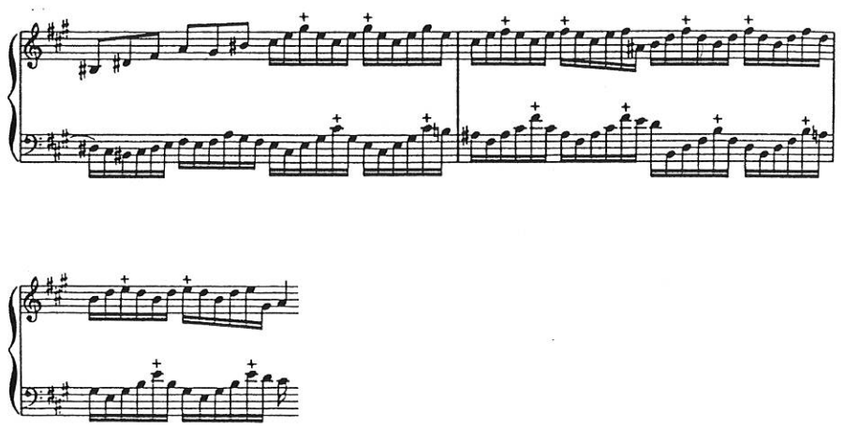
[65] Ibid., 372; translation in Rothfarb 1991, 53.

[66] Kurth 1922, 361, 368.

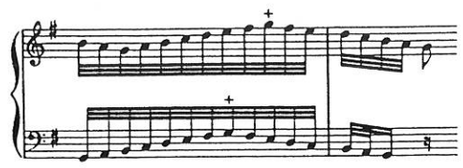
[67] Ibid., 369; translation in Rothfarb 1991, 53. 'Bachs Zweistimmigkeit zeigt das zackig durchrissesene Bild einander *durchschneidender* Wellen mit ihrem Aufbäumen und Abebben und wechselndem Übergreifen.'

Example 2. Crossing of melodic peaks in Bach's two-part counterpoint. Kurth 1922, 361-9

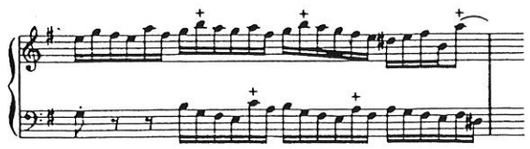
Example 2(a). Invention in A major BWV 783 mm. 12-14.



Example 2(b). Clavier Duet in E minor BWV 802, mm. 29-30.



Example 2(c). Clavier Duet in G major BWV 804, m. 17.



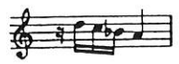
According to Kurth, the form of Bach's polyphonic pieces rests above all on the processes of "consolidation and dissolution" (*Verdichtung, Auflösung*) of "thematic motion".[68] By this he means the way thematic material can be broken down into (or reassembled from) basic motives which are common to many different works. Although he claims that the processes occur in all Bach's polyphonic genres, Kurth devotes his attention to fugues. Most previous fugal theory, he argues, concentrates on the exposition and later entries of the subject, and tends to belittle the episodes, or "transitional passages" (*Zwischenspiele*). For Kurth, the transitions are vitally important in fugal form, since they present, as it were, distilled images of the basic types of musical motion. In fully realized thematic passages, these fundamental motions are less obviously apparent. Transitions can therefore be used with great flexibility for the "balancing of motions". If a statement of the subject concludes with a marked slackening of tension, for instance, the ensuing transition might consist of an intensification leading to a climax at the start of the next entry. Alternatively, if a statement of the subject builds towards a climax but does not quite reach it, the transition might round off that peak and release the tension before building once again in readiness for the next thematic presentation.[69]

Kurth associates intensification with rising melodic gestures, relaxation with falling gestures. He therefore analyses transitions in terms of three basic types of motive, which he calls "developmental motives" (*Entwicklungsmotive*): ascending, descending and "floating" motives (Example 3).

Example 3. Kurth's 'developmental motives'. (1922, 428-26)

Example 3(a). Ascending

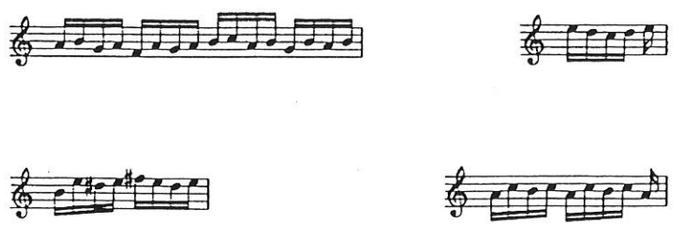
Example 3(b). Descending



[68] Kurth 1922, 408–38. Most of the relevant chapter is translated in Rothfarb 1991, 58–74.

[69] Kurth 1922, 412–6; Rothfarb 1991, 62–5.

Example 3(c). Floating

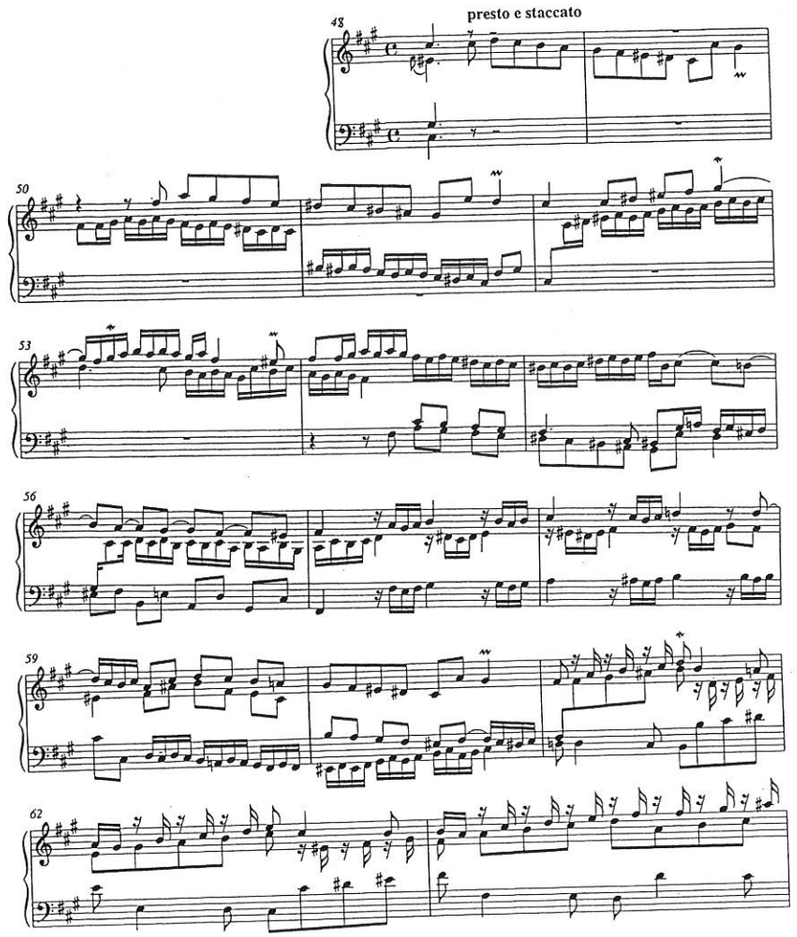


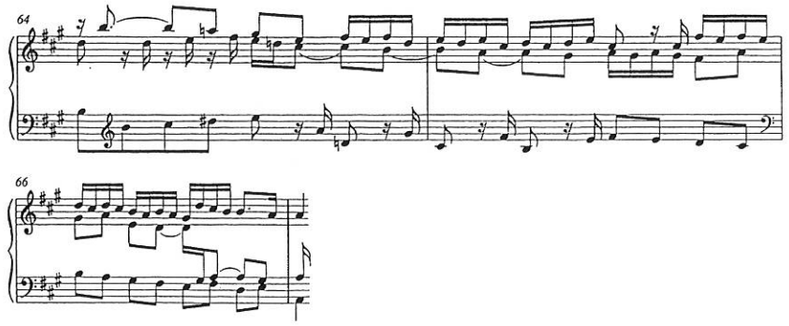
(The latter type consists of a wavering or oscillating pattern around a single pitch level.)[70] These are intentionally conceived in extremely general terms so that they can be derived from virtually any theme. Thus the transitional passages of a polyphonic pieces will tend towards a few recognizable motivic shapes. The motives can then be employed in a myriad of different ways. Hybrid forms may emerge, for instance, which bear a passing resemblance to more than one motivic type, or a series of ascending motives may be joined in such a way as to serve an overall descending progression. The basic formal principle always remains, however. Bach's polyphonic works, and his fugues in particular, rely on the alternation of, on the one hand, thematic material that is unmistakably unique to the particular piece and, on the other, transitional passages that contain universal motivic shapes, yet which present an especially vivid impression of musical motion. Kurth cites several brief passages from the opening 19 measures of the fugue from the Toccata in F sharp minor BWV 910 (the whole section is shown in Example 4). He identifies the transition in mm. 57–8 as a hybrid of ascending and oscillating motives and the one in mm. 65–6 as a "slowly descending" motion—essentially a hybrid of descending and oscillating forms. Both are derived from the fugue's countersubject, first stated in m. 50, which Kurth derives in turn from the subject itself. Had Kurth embarked on a more comprehensive analysis in this vein, he might have taken note of two further transitions based respectively on unambiguous descending and ascending motives (mm. 56 and 61–4). And he might have called attention to the statement of the subject in mm. 59–60, which represents a process of thematic "consolidation" amidst the "dissolution" of the various transitional passages.

[70] Kurth 1922, 421–6; Rothfarb 1991, 67–8. I prefer the literal translation of 'schwebend' as 'floating' to Rothfarb's 'oscillating', even though the latter accurately describes the motivic patterns that Kurth cites. Kurth thinks of this motivic motion as 'lightly swaying' as though something is carried in 'weightless flight' (1922, 425). On developmental motives see Rothfarb 1988, 55–77.

Kurth's developmental motives perform a function in Bach's counterpoint similar to that of the "simple motives" in interlaced ornament as described by Lamprecht. Both are few in number, yet are said to be capable of employment in a rich variety of ways. In the advanced stage of animal ornament, as in Figure 1, a comparable process of consolidation and dissolution is at work, as critics of Kurth's day were aware. Fragments of the complete animals of earlier styles are scattered across the design, yet they quickly dissolve into general, abstract curves. Sometimes, if traced carefully to their terminations, they reveal an "eye" at both ends, and perhaps even in the middle as well. Similarly, in Kurth's analyses of Bach, subject statements outlining definite thematic shapes dissolve into generalized transitional passages before reassembling themselves once again.

Example 4. Bach, Toccata in F# minor BWV 910, mm. 48-66 (opening of fugue).





Kurth is at pains to point out the aesthetic significance of the developmental motives, conveying as they do a sense of motion in a more immediate fashion than the subject statements (regardless of the actual thematic contours of the latter). "It is here that *Bach's* personality, in its demonic depths, shines forth most forcefully from the work of art." The transitions represent "the expression of emotion released from all bonds", "an etherealization into the incorporeal".[71] He makes the tantalizing observation that thematic dissolution "leads back to the aesthetic and ultimate psychological foundations of linear art in general", but without confirming whether the concept of "linear art in general" stretches beyond music.[72] The critics of the interlaced ornamental style similarly attached the greatest aesthetic importance to the effect of the abstract linear patterns. It is here, rather than in the representation of animal parts, that Lamprecht's "passionately vital motion" is felt. In short, both interpretations posit a duality in the aesthetic object which pits definite characterization against pure linear fantasy, while at the same time insisting on a certain aesthetic priority for the latter.

Thus it is possible to imagine complementary aesthetic responses to Figure 1 and Example 4. When the viewer's gaze first rests upon the metalwork, it is inevitably drawn to one of the large circles in the central area: the conspicuous "eyes". They invite the viewer to dwell for a while, trying to discern a coherent head or face from the ornate detail that immediately surrounds them. However, the gaze is eventually drawn away along the thin "bodies" in an attempt to find some wider significance in the composition. Now there is much less detail to occupy the eye, and it sweeps rapidly across the piece, following the sinuous path of the line. Eventually, another "head" is encountered, and the gaze is once again held in scrutiny. In Bach's fugue, the initial exposition (mm. 48–55) is concerned with the presentation of the theme in all three voices, inviting, as it were, its measured contemplation from dif-

[71] Kurth, *Grundlagen*, 436–7. 'Hier ist es, wo *Bachs* Persönlichkeit in ihren dämonischen Tiefen am gewaltigsten aus dem Kunstwerk herausleuchtet'; 'von allen Fesseln gelöster Bewegungsausdruck'; 'ein Aufgehen ins Wesenlose'.

[72] Kurth 1922, 438; translated in Rothfarb 1991, 74; 'führt…zu den aesthetischen und letzten psychologischen Grundlagen der Linienkunst überhaupt zurück'.

ferent perspectives. The first transitional passage (mm. 56–58), by contrast, is dedicated to the vivid expression of motion. A descent to the tonic cadence on the first beat of m. 57 is followed by a gradual ascent over the next two measures, resulting in an overall "curve". This transition finally reaches the next thematic statement in mm. 59–60, which prompts the listener to contemplate the subject again. A second transition then describes a curve of the opposite orientation and of larger dimensions, which reaches its apex in m. 64. The aim here is not to characterize the thematic statements as static: that would be wholly contrary to Kurth's understanding. Instead, their function as agents of characterization facilitates an opposition between different ways of hearing the respective components of the fugal form.

The analogy between the two aesthetic responses is imperfect, not least because the viewer of the metal ornament has a range of choices as to how and where to direct attention which are not open to the musical listener. But the attempt to hear Bach's counterpoint through the categories of the art critics at least gives us a chance of constructing a musical version of the urgent, restless impulses of Worringer's Gothic man. The listener, projecting human feelings onto the abstract, convoluted tangle of lines in the musical texture, is swept along by the vigorous "motion" of the linear counterpoint, above all in the transitional passages. This act of empathy results not in the reassuring, human emotions allegedly purveyed by the Classical idiom, but in Worringer's "uncanny pathos" as the lines press ever onwards in an act of hyper-expression, an effort to transcend the constricting ties of everyday experience.

Expressionist Hearing

Kurth's occasionally precarious theoretical arguments have prompted Carl Dahlhaus to argue that linear counterpoint is best interpreted—somewhat against Kurth's own rhetoric—not as an attempt rigorously to account for the complex interaction of harmony and counterpoint, but as signposts for a way of hearing.[73] Kurth's occasional references to "melodic hearing" versus "harmonic hearing" could be cited in support of this position.[74] On the other hand, Kurth's psychological approach to music theory owes much of its flexibility to the fact that in general he refuses to confine the mode of subjectivity he describes—the unconscious tension processes, psychic motions and so on—to any particular figure in the musical economy, whether the composer, the listener or even himself, the theorist. In those passages of *Grundlagen* that are redolent of Worringer, then, Kurth seems to be appropriating the sublime hysteric—the subject constructed by the Expressionist art

[73] Dahlhaus 1962, 58–61.

[74] Kurth 1922, 9, 59–62.

historian—sometimes as an image of Bach, sometimes as an invitation to a certain kind of behavior on the part of the listener.[75]

Unlike Worringer, however, who welcomed contemporary Expressionism in the visual arts, Kurth avoided any positive engagement with the musical movement that, by the 1920s, had come to bear the same name. In *Bruckner*, indeed, he condemns it as "the muddling of shamelessness with artistic talent."[76] To be sure, in one chapter of his treatise *Romantische Harmonik und ihre Krise in Wagners "Tristan"* (1920), Kurth develops an opposition between musical "Expressionism" and "Impressionism". But whereas he carefully documents the development of Impressionist tendencies through the nineteenth century—identifying them with a striving for richness on music's phenomenal level and with the forgoing of "clear lines" in favor of purely sonic effects—he is reticent on the subject of Expressionism. It serves to set the conceptual compass points of the chapter, but is never applied to specific works.[77]

Neverthless, Kurth appears to admit an alternative meaning for musical Expressionism, a theoretical one unconnected with abrasive modernist compositional practice. He maintains that Bruckner's music contains elements of both Expressionism and Impressionism, as long as the former—a "much distorted concept"—is understood simply as an "art of the most direct expression." In *Romantische Harmonik*, he explains that "Expressionism, or at least a development in its direction, is conditioned through heightened empathy in the energetic expression, the kinetic tensions, [whereas] Impressionism is conditioned through their easing, the *calm repose*".[78] In this sense, "musical Expressionism" stands both for an art that realizes music's essential dynamic impulses and for a kind of listening that engages in empathy with them. It denotes, in other words, Kurth's favored repertory and his way of interpreting it.

Despite *Grundlagen*'s early notoriety, Kurth's covert Expressionist leanings did not have much of a legacy. They reflect a strand of aesthetic thinking which flourished in the first two decades of the twentieth century, but which was soon eclipsed. By 1920, even Worringer had declared "the end of Expressionism".[79] The critics and composers of the next decade who seized on the notion of linear counterpoint were attracted to forms of Neoclassicism and the then fashionable "Neue Sachlichkeit",

[75] Brian Hyer's (1990) insightful interpretation of Kurth's work on Romantic harmony as a theory of "musical hysteria" along Freudian lines strongly resonates with the argument I have been advancing.

[76] Kurth [1925] 1971, 213. "[Die] Verwechselung mangelden Schamgefühls mit künstlerischem Talent."

[77] Kurth 1923, 384–94.

[78] Kurth [1925] 1971, 213; 1923, 394. 'Expressionismus oder auch nur eine nach seiner Richtung neigende Entwicklung ist vor allem bedingt durch gesteigerte Einfühlung in den energetischen Ausdruck, die Bewegungsspannungen, Impressionismus durch deren Stillung, die *gelöste Ruhe*'.

[79] Worringer 1956, 106–29.

and naturally had little desire to dwell on Kurth's references to spiritual striving, longing and ecstasy. Later, under the Nazis, true German music was deemed to be heroic, uplifting and wholesome: the idea that it might express tension or inner disharmony was out of the question.[80] In any case, one of the few early readers who actually remarked on the connection between Kurth's image of Bach and the psychology of the "Gothic man"—the musicologist Werner Danckert—did so only for the purpose of dismissing it. He complained of an outdated approach to Bach in which "one almost spoke of 'musical Gothic' and in the end explained even Bach's Baroque melos as the pinnacle of Western 'linear counterpoint' (Kurth)!" He added that, contrary to Kurth, "Bach is no 'Gothic man', a creator of freely vaulting organic lines, but a great architect who knows how to handle physical masses."[81]

So, just as the radical aspects of Kurth's image of Bach directly conflicted with the topos of a cure for disease that prevailed at the turn of the century, they eventually proved no less out-of-step with subsequent developments. But for this very reason, they are worthy of our close attention. Though portrayed as a specifically German figure, Kurth's Bach is not the sturdy monument of nationalist discourse, but a restless mystic whose music is imbued with psychic tensions that are only too familiar to the modern age.

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[80] The link between German music and Gothic architecture occasionally re-emerged in the 1930s, but was never again taken very far. See Potter 1988, 207, 210.

[81] Danckert 1932, 102, 107. "Man sprach geradezu von "musikalischer Gotik" und erklärte am Ende gar Bachs barockes Melos für den Höhepunkt abendländischen 'linearen Kontrapunkts' (Kurth)!" "Bach ist kein "Gotiker", kein Gestalter freischwingender organischer Linien, sondern ein großer Baumeister, der mit irdischen Massen umzugehen weiß."

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